

Southern Sierra IRWMP Launch Project for Submission to the Sierra Nevada Conservancy

Goal and Objectives

The long-term goal of the Southern Sierra Integrated Regional Water Management Planning Launch Project (***IRWMP Launch Project***) is to initiate a process leading to the completion of an integrated regional water management plan. The primary objective of the Project is to establish an IRWM Planning process and funding proposal centered on watersheds in Southern Sierra that will (1) enhance and facilitate coordination across the region, (2) develop and implement projects that are multi-benefit, (3) attract funding necessary for the implementation of projects contained within the "plan", and (4) raise the profile and recognition of water management needs and possibilities in the Southern Sierra.

This project will explore the formation of one or two Southern Sierra IRWMPs covering the Upper San Joaquin, Upper Kings, Upper Kaweah, Upper Tule / Deer Creek, and Upper Kern watersheds, which currently lack IRWM Plans.

This IRWMP Launch Project represents Phase I of this long-term plan. In the IRWMP Launch Project, a team of Southern Sierra water resource stakeholders, with the help of a consultant from the Sierra Nevada Alliance, will launch a broad stakeholder based IRWM Planning process and governance structure for Southern watersheds and associated watersheds.

Need

IRWM Planning is the state's latest management strategy to address multiple water issues, coordinate across jurisdictional boundaries, develop high cost-benefit projects, reduce local conflict, and streamline the disbursement of funding to distinct regions. The State is allocating millions of dollars for IRWM Planning and Implementation through Prop 50 and Prop 84.

To date, there are a number of state-funded IRWMPs in the Sierra: Cosumnes, American, Bear, Yuba (CABY); Feather; Tahoe-Sierra; Mokelumne-Amador Calaveras; Tuolumne/Stanslaus, and Yuba County Water Agency IRWMPs. Though this may sound like a number of plans, there remain large blocks of contiguous watershed areas within the Sierra-Cascade range that are not yet part of any IRWMP. Areas not identified in an IRWMP cannot access the major source of state funding for water resource management. In addition, IRWM Plans could also become requirements or at least extra credit on other state-funded grant opportunities. Therefore to ensure adequate funding is available for water management IRWM Plans are an increasingly important component of regional water management activities given climate change and growing California population.

Through Prop 84, the state is divided into Funding Areas, which are each given a funding allocation. The IRWMP Sacramento Funding Area is allocated \$60 M. Currently, there are four existing IRWMPs in the Tulare Hydrologic Funding Area – Poso Creek, Upper Kings (not the Sierra portion), Kaweah Delta, and Westside IRWMPs. Three of the four existing IRWMPs are governed by water agencies. The Upper Kings IRWMP is governed by the Kings Conservation District. The existing IRWMPs are in the process of forming a JPA to develop an umbrella IRWMP for the entire Tulare Valley. As part of these negotiations, parties have considered development of an IRWMP for the Tulare Lake Bed (Boswell).

Despite all this activity, as of yet, none of the rest of the existing or proposed IRWMPs cover the Sierra portions of these southern watersheds. Based on initial interviews with some of the IRWMPs and stakeholders, there are mixed ideas about whether or not to extend into the Sierra and how those stakeholders might have a voice in IRWMPs governed by Valley agricultural interests.

Therefore, this IRWMP Launch Project seeks to bring together the Southern Sierra stakeholders to decide how they would like to develop their own IRWMP or become part of the existing IRWMPs and then apply for DWR IRWMP grant funding for the process they develop.

Urgency

The Southern IRWMP Launch Project is urgent because of the need to prepare for the scheduled DWR IRWMP Planning Grant deadline proposed for the end of summer 2008 or early fall 2008.

It is suspected that at this point DWR is only planning to conduct one planning grant round for IRWMP funding under Prop 84. If indeed they only conduct one round of planning grant funding, this summer/fall will be the only opportunity for the Southern Sierra to capitalize on IRWM Planning grant funds from DWR. Without the planning grant funding, it is unlikely these Sierra stakeholders will be able to put together an IRWM Plan and Implementation proposal to be eligible for DWR IRWMP funding from the Tulare Hydrologic Unit.

Expected Outcome

The expected outcome of this IRWMP Launch Project is the development of a Planning Grant Proposal, to DWR's IRWMP Program submitted in late summer or fall 2008. In the past, these Planning grants have ranged around \$500,000 to fund development of an IRWM Plan. Building off the Plan, regions then develop Implementation Proposals to DWR for project funding.

This overall outcome will be supported by a number of smaller objectives including:

- Identification of and outreach to stakeholders in water management and disadvantaged communities,

- Facilitated regional workshops to define regional boundaries; develop a governance plan; identify a regional management authority; and collect existing water resource plans and,
- Scaling up of water management activities in a manner that promotes transparency among and between a broad coalition of stakeholders

This IRWMP Launch Project will enable the long-term expected outcomes and benefits of an IRWMP including: development and implementation of an IRWM Plan; state funding for implementation of the plan; higher level of coordination and collaboration between a broad range of water resource stakeholders in the region; and coordination between this IRWMP and others in the region and state.

The Sierra Nevada Conservancy's funding of this project will enable the region to leverage millions of dollars from the state for collaboratively developed water resource management.

Replicability

This IRWMP Launch Project will build off of successful Sierra IRWMP models from the CABY, Feather, and Tahoe-Sierra IRWMPs, as well as newly launched Sierra IRWMPs in the Stanislaus / Tuolumne. These IRWMP models have included a broad range of stakeholders, developed balanced governance structure and processes, developed multi-benefit projects implemented by stakeholders partnering across sectors; and evaluated and prioritized projects for funding.

Groups in the Southern Sierra region already have a host of collaborative projects through which they coordinate and develop projects for mutual benefit. The IRWMP Launch Project will build off of these existing collaborations and any existing plans to create the foundation for the Southern IRWMP. For example, the Sierra RCD (Eastern Fresno County) just started a Watershed Assessment of the Upper San Joaquin for which they are bringing together stakeholders. In addition, the same stakeholders in Eastern Fresno County have recently formed an Eastern Fresno County Water Forum, which they intended to be a precursor to an IRWMP.

Land and Water Benefits

IRWMPs offer benefits that go beyond funding. IRWMPs can reduce local conflict over water resources if they are conducted with high levels of collaboration and integration. IRWM Planning can also help identify multi-benefit consensus projects that are "low hanging fruit" and develop much-needed alliances across water resource sectors that enable stronger more competitive projects. Alliances formed across water interest sectors can be used to influence water resources management at a state level. Furthermore, IRWMPs also offer a way to coordinate from region to region, accessing broad stakeholder groups through the regional entities. IRWMPs may even become a regional basis for the State Water Plan. Finally, the broad stakeholder forum can create